

Fort Sill puts the polo back at Polo Field

Did you know the area referred today as Polo Field and routinely used for change of command ceremonies, Half-section demonstrations, etc. has been the scene of many historic activities, some of which pre-date the existence of Fort Sill itself?

The Wichita Indians who were closely allied with the French, camped on these grounds in the 18th century before moving to the area of the present post quadrangle in the early 19th century.

Nearby Cache Creek takes its name from the practice of the Wichita Indians digging "cache pits" in the ground for food storage.

The Wichita people also maintained two "Indian forts" with palisade log walls surrounded by moats on both the north and south perimeters of what is now the state of Oklahoma. The nearest Wichita fort was south of Ringling, Okla. on the north side of the Red River. Although it is erroneously referred to today as "Spanish Fort," the purpose of this Wichita fort was actually to protect the area from Spanish incursions. A major battle was fought here involving Spanish cannons in the mid-1750s.

When Capt. Randolph

Marcy explored the area of present Fort Sill in 1852, he noted the ruins of a Wichita village on what would later become the parade ground of Fort Sill. Archeological excavations in the 1970s confirmed the presence of this Wichita village. Marcy was the first to recommend the establishment of a fort at this location near the confluence of Cache and Medicine creeks.

During the early years of Fort Sill's existence, the yet-to-be Polo Field area was the site of regular horse races among the officers and also between the Soldiers and Indians.

As early as 1871, the officers established a betting pool of prize money for races to determine who had the fastest horse in the regiment, troop or company.

In the 1890s, both the Soldiers and Indians would compete in horse racing and foot racing on these grounds, particularly on the Fourth of July. Many of these Indians were also soldiers in Troop L, 7th U.S. Cavalry reconstituted in 1891 at Fort Sill as an all-Indian unit. Previously, it was an all-Anglo unit under Col. George Custer and was wiped out at the Little Big Horn in 1876.

The Apache soldiers were



Did you know?

By Col. Raymond Lacey
Fort Sill Garrison commander

also officially prisoners of war at the time. Historic photographs in the museum archives confirm the presence of Geronimo at these races.

The little creek at the south end of the field is known as Sitting Bear Creek named for the famous Kiowa war chief, Setank or "Sitting Bear." He was killed where the road crossed the creek (east side of I-44) in May 1871 while attempting to escape from an Army escort taking him to Texas to stand trial for murder.

Polo

Polo as a sport, was first introduced to the United States in 1876 and the first polo team in the U.S. Army was formed by the cavalry at Fort Sill in 1893 using Indian ponies. When the cavalry was replaced by field artillery in 1907, polo continued as an important equestrian activity at Fort Sill and throughout the Army as well.

The appearance of motorized vehicles around World

War I signaled the end of the horse in the military and generated an even greater interest in polo, the steeple chase, the artillery or fox hunt and other horse-related events during the 1920s and 30s.

The Polo Club House was built Oct. 19, 1910 at a cost of \$800. The original 1,033-square-foot facility was expanded to 3,064 square feet by World War II when polo activities drew to a close. The era between the wars was the heyday of polo, however. It was during this period that the Fort Sill teams participated in national and international competitions, winning many trophies against other military and civilian teams throughout the U.S., Mexico, Argentina and Australia.

In the 1920s, Polo Field was expanded to the south by clearing timber and installing sod to make this the longest polo field in the U.S. Local farmers provided the Bermuda grass, and the sod was transported by

mules. The north section of the field had always consisted of native grasses without any timber. The size of the field was considered ideal since training and competitions could be shifted to different areas giving the grass time to recover.

Polo notables

Among the many notable individuals who played polo at Fort Sill was Maj. Gen. Edwin "Ted" Walker who died in Dallas in 1993. Walker was an artilleryman who later commanded the elite 1st Special Service Force in WWII and trained Rangers for the Korean War. In 1957 he was ordered by President Eisenhower to use federal troops to force school integration in Little Rock, Ark. Since he was opposed to integration, he offered his resignation but the president turned it down. He was featured on the cover of Time Magazine during this event.

In 1963, Walker was ambushed by Lee Harvey Oswald with the same rifle later used to assassinate President John Kennedy in Dallas. Walker had been fired by Kennedy earlier for distributing John Birch Society literature to Soldiers in Germany, a charge he later denied.

There were other celebrities and high ranking officers such as Will Rogers, Wiley Post and Gen. George Patton who played polo on the Fort Sill grounds during this between war period.

Maj. Gen. John Lucas was one of the top polo contestants during that period and in 1968 the field was memorialized as Lucas Field in his honor. The last polo competitions were played on Lucas Field during the summer of 1968.

Many of these polo and horse related events and personnel have long since been forgotten, but Polo Field and the club house are still fixtures here.

Polo revived

Fort Sill will host the first Fort Sill Polo Classic May 8 at 2 p.m. at Polo Field. The match is free and open to the public. For information, call 442-3269.

To reach me

To send questions or comments to me, please e-mail fscms@conus.army.mil or you can mail your comments to Commander, USAG-Fort Sill, 462 Hamilton Road, Suite 120, Fort Sill, OK 73503.

Thanks and have a great Fort Sill day.

Sill shorts

Business off-limits

Gert's Pub and Grub in Lawton remains off-limits, by order of Maj. Gen. David Halverson, Fires Center of Excellence and Fort Sill commanding general. This order applies to all military personnel to

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52nd Street Gate

The 52nd Street Gate is closed on all holidays, training holidays and all weekends.

Road closures

One lane of Bald Ridge Road

from Beef Creek Road to East Boundary Road is under construction until spring.

The parking lots on Geronimo Road, between Sheridan and Corral roads are under construction. The lots will remain in use.

The parking lots on Randolph

Road between Sheridan and Harry roads are also under construction.

Museum open Sundays

The Fort Sill Museum has extended its Sunday hours to 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Field Artillery Museum is open Sundays from noon to 5 p.m.

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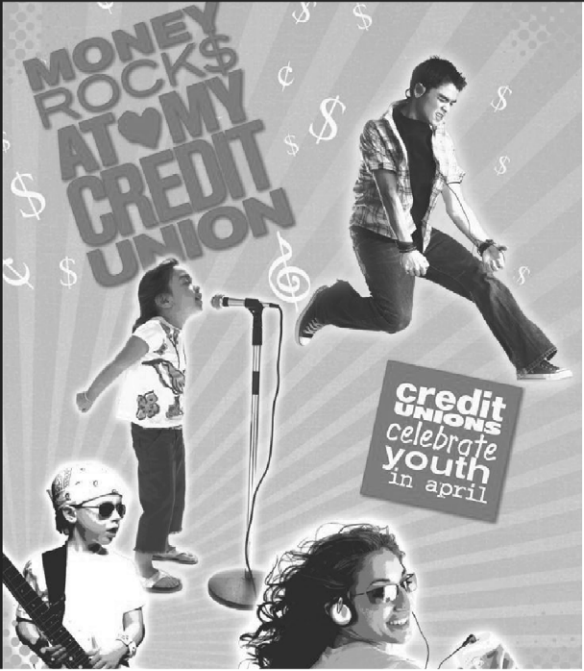
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